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Joint Inspection Unit

Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on reforming the Field Service category of personnel in the United Nations peace operations

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

The present report is submitted pursuant to article 11 of the Statute of the Joint Inspection Unit. It transmits for the consideration of the members of the General Assembly the Secretary-General's comments on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on reforming the Field Service category of personnel in the United Nations Peace Operations (A/57/78).

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Comments of the Secretary-General on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on reforming the Field Service category of personnel in the United Nations peace operations

I. Introduction

1. The Secretary-General welcomes the compilation of the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) and commends its assessment and recognition of the many timely issues relating to the reform of the Field Service category of personnel in the United Nations peace operations.

2. It should be noted at the outset that, while the Department of Peacekeeping Operations worked with JIU during the preparation of the report, the Department had already started conducting its own review of the Field Service category on the basis of the report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (A/55/305-S/2000/809), which first called for the revision of Field Service category to better match the present and future demands of field operations, with a particular emphasis on mid- to senior- level managers in key administrative and logistical areas.

3. A significant part of the plan of action regarding the implementation of the recommendations contained in the report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations has been the restructuring of the Personnel Management and Support Service of the Office of Mission Support of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (see A/C.5/55/46 and Corr.1 and A/C.5/55/46/Add.1, paras. 5.45-5.62). This entails the establishment of two new sections in the Service: the Civilian Training Section and the Human Resources Planning and Development Section. The new resources approved for these sections, as well as the redeployment within the Service, would enable the Department to review many of its human resources policies and practices, as well as to suggest modifications in the conditions of service, in respect of all staff serving in the field. It is against this background, and given that the work is still very much in progress in this regard, that the Secretary-General's comments on the specific recommendations of JIU remain unavoidably general.

4. It is noted that the JIU report seems not to have established any link between the organizational human resources reform as a whole and the Field Service reform. The Administration believes that the Secretary-General's initiative concerning staff mobility in the context of human resources reform is particularly relevant and should be taken into account, especially as regards its impact, if any, on the number of Field Service officers needed in the future.

II. Comments on specific recommendations

Recommendation 1: The General Assembly may wish to request the Secretary-General to prepare and submit to it at its fifty-eighth session a detailed and comprehensive proposal for the future composition of the Field Service category of personnel. The review should include a clear definition of the occupational groups and numbers of individuals needed in each, as well as criteria for the identification of present staff members, either Field Service officers or staff on appointments of limited duration currently filling Field Service posts, who will be integrated into the new Field Service and those who will need to be redeployed or phased out.

5. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations has already commenced a review of the Field Service category (see A/55/502, paras. 103-111, and A/56/732, para. 35). As mentioned in the Introduction, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations has continued its work, in consultation with the Field Service Staff Union and the Office of Human Resources Management, on the concept and structure of a revised Field Service category. In order to define the core operational requirements, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations has started collecting and analysing the necessary demographic and other data of personnel serving in the field as well as occupational groups currently used in field operations. Once the profile of the organizational structure, based on mission templates and modules, as well as that of its staff, is completed, including the establishment of generic job profiles for functions at the Field Service level, a managed mobility system, selection criteria and

procedures, as well as issues related to the conditions of service, need to be discussed and agreed upon.

6. The further review in respect of the composition of the revised Field Service category, will, of course, take into account the current Field Service officers as a unique pool of experienced and highly mobile individuals. Necessary transitional measures would need to be agreed upon, in consultation with the Union and the Office of Human Resources Management, for example with regard to the move from one category to another. Moreover, the importance of linking the restructuring exercise to other aspects of the implementation of the global staffing strategy adopted by the Department has to be recognized. Consequently, any subsequent review would include staff members who have been appointed under the 300 series of the Staff Rules (appointments of limited duration). Those support staff (international General Service staff) currently fill occupational gaps in the field for which Field Service officers traditionally would not have been hired owing to the limitation of occupational groups in the Field Service category and the recruitment freeze since 1993. Likewise, the increased use of local General Service staff and national professional officers in peacekeeping missions needs to be addressed.

7. After the completion of consultations with relevant offices and Field Service staff representatives, any necessary analysis of the requirements in the field and the inventory of skills and competencies of current field staff, the Secretary-General would prepare a comprehensive proposal for the future composition and conditions of service of the Field Service category to the General Assembly, as also suggested by JIU.

Recommendation 2: The Secretary-General should prepare a full assessment of the training needed to address the shortage of managerial, supervisory and specialized technical skills among those Field Service staff who will be retained.

(a) As a first step, the Field Administration and Logistics Division of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations should complete urgently (by mid-2002) the inventory of skills and competencies available among Field Service officers on which this needs assessment will be based;

(b) In conjunction with the Office of Human Resources Management, the Division should develop a plan of courses, with detailed cost estimates and a timeline, that should be offered to Field Service officers.

8. The implementation of this recommendation is linked to the restructuring of the Personnel Management and Support Service of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the activities of the two new sections referred to in paragraph 3 above, which would involve the development of more systematic career management of field staff, including their training, career development and managed rotation. As mentioned earlier, many of the recommendations made by JIU, including the one concerning the skills inventory and training needs, will be carried out by the Personnel Management and Support Service in the context of the work for all field staff.

9. Therefore, given the fact that Field Service officers currently represent only 13 per cent of all staff serving in the field, the Department would have wished JIU to go even beyond this narrow scope in the report to recommend an extension of the inventory of skills and competencies to all staff working in peacekeeping missions, not only Field Service officers, in order to develop an Organization-wide workforce needs assessment based on existing human resources and the needs and trends of the profiles required.

10. Moreover, the new sections will develop, as part of the global staffing strategy, a strategy for succession planning to address the chronic shortage of skilled and experienced personnel in certain key functions. These plans, as well as the envisaged training programmes, are aimed at offering career development prospects to field staff as well as maintaining their professional competitiveness, not only in the field missions, but also in external labour markets, thereby expanding the concept of sustained employability beyond the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. In addition, the development of a placement and promotion system, as well as the revision of the performance appraisal system, would form an essential part of the work of the Service. All these initiatives would significantly affect the approach employed in proceeding with the revision of the Field Service category, particularly in terms of its composition, occupational groups and numbers.

11. While the Office of Human Resources Management continues to work with the Department of

Peacekeeping Operations on field-related training, this area of development is outside the mandate of the Office under the regular budget. It is important that any staff development and training across the Organization deliver a consistent message and be integrated under the Office's direction and policy. The Office itself, however, cannot commit itself to training matters that fall outside its mandate.

12. The Unit commented on the need to develop a specific training programme for Field Service staff in cooperation with the United Nations Staff College, with a special emphasis on the need for managerial and supervisory skills development (A/57/78, para. 34). It is necessary to stress that any programme in these areas should be built on the success of related programmes of the Office of Human Resources Management. This would help to ensure the quality of the training and the consistency of the message transmitted to all staff.

Recommendation 3: The concept of parent duty station should be revisited within the context of the reform of the Field Service in order to align the entitlements of Field Service officers with those of other categories of staff, while continuing to reward adequately mobility and hardship. The Secretary-General should submit to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session a detailed cost-benefit analysis of all Field Service officers based at United Nations Headquarters and rotating from there.

13. The Administration agrees that the parent duty station concept, together with the attendant entitlements and benefits, needs to be reviewed and revised, taking into account the practice of other field-oriented agencies and organizations. However, while the Department of Peacekeeping Operations strongly advocates the integration of field staff with the global Secretariat, including the increased and more systematic mobility of field staff to Headquarters, the suggestion to designate New York as the parent office for Field Service officers has not only significant budgetary, and possibly political, implications, but may not have the desired effect on the "human dimension" of Field Service life, in particular as regards the family members. All options require a careful analysis, including an assessment of the costs involved.

14. The Administration would therefore propose that instead of designating New York as the administrative duty station for the new Field Service category, consideration be given to the possibility of extending to peacekeeping operations the practice followed by some United Nations agencies of establishing an administrative parent duty station in an established duty station or in a neighbouring third country in the region. This has the advantage of recognizing the difficulties of field staff who do not have a parent duty station (mission appointees), and all staff would benefit from the installation of their families at an established duty station, in a third country or in a country of their choice, thereby providing a secure family base for the duration of mission service and facilitating easier family reunions.

15. While there seems to be general agreement with the recommendation to align the entitlements of Field Service officers with other categories of staff, the Administration's main concern is to align the conditions of service and simplify the administration of entitlements of all staff serving in the field. The objective is to give serious consideration to any effort to improve, streamline and simplify conditions of service for field personnel, including contractual instruments and remuneration packages, with a view to narrowing the differences in emoluments and benefits between staff whose service is limited to a specific mission and assigned staff.

16. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations continues to work with all parties concerned, including the Office of Human Resources Management, partner agencies of the United Nations common system and the International Civil Service Commission to ensure that the system of administering entitlements is simplified, and also to ensure that field staff are adequately compensated for dangerous, stressful and difficult working conditions in missions.

17. The importance of adequate compensation and the recognition of the duty hazards endured by all members of peacekeeping missions have been repeatedly underscored by the Administration. Such hazards include exposure to high-risk areas, health hazards, extreme climatic conditions, lack of basic amenities and a strong sense of isolation. There is a need, on the one hand, to improve conditions of service in concrete terms, be it through the provision of appropriate medical facilities, the availability of goods and/or improved housing and infrastructure. On the other hand, if the Organization is to attract and retain the most qualified individuals, it also needs to provide

additional financial compensation, which recognizes such dedicated service under adverse conditions.

Recommendation 4: As a corollary to this review of the system of parent duty stations, the Secretary-General should devise and propose to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session a new policy for mobility and rotation of Field Service officers. In particular, in consultation with the Field Administration and Logistics Division, the Office of Human Resources Management and the Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator, the process for the designation of duty stations as family or non-family should be revised, taking into account:

(a) The need to minimize family separations and provide adequate conditions for the welfare of families;

(b) Financial considerations;

(c) Practices of other United Nations organizations.

18. Further to the comments provided in recommendation 3 above, there appears to be general agreement with the recommendation to review the process for designating duty stations as family or non-family. The Office of Human Resources Management, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator will discuss the matter, as the current system is administratively cumbersome and leads to additional discrepancies as regards the salaries and allowances of various categories of staff serving in the field.

19. With regard to the rotation policy, the changes in the Personnel Management and Support Service mentioned above would allow the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to plan, manage, train and place Field Service officers in a more transparent and orderly fashion. It should be noted that in all cases rotation of staff will be dictated by operational requirements, however, there is concurrence that the rotation of staff should be linked to succession planning and the identification of skill gaps in various occupational groups.

Recommendation 5: Field Service officers should be administered along the same lines as other staff members who are also recruited under the 100 series of Staff Rules and Regulations. In particular:

(a) Further authority should be delegated to missions in the field to approve and process entitlements of Field Service officers.

20. The Administration is in favour of such a delegation, as soon as the necessary directives and administrative instructions and guidelines have been issued, standardized formats and forms have been promulgated, training programmes have been implemented and monitoring mechanisms have been put in place, including the development of electronic processing tools and interfaces with the Integrated Management Information System. While the Administration is in favour of moving staff services closer to the clients, a distinction should be made between the delegation of authority, with the resultant accountability, and the decentralization of processes. In addition, rather than delegating authority in respect of a specific group of staff (Field Service officers), the Department of Peacekeeping Operations is currently identifying specific entitlements and benefits, the processing of which will be delegated to the field.

(b) Procedures and criteria for the recruitment and promotion of Field Service officers should be amended to comply with those presently applicable to General Service or Professional staff.

21. The promotion of General Service and Professional staff members, with the exception of promotion up to the G-4 level, is based on the vacancy management system. When posts become available, staff members apply and are selected through a competitive process. This is not possible for the promotion of Field Service officers, as they have to be deployed on short notice when the need arises, that is, when positions become available. In addition, those positions may not be available for a long duration. Moreover, General Service staff members must pass the G to P examination for movement to the Professional level.

22. Part of the ongoing work of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations with regard to the review of the currently serving staff and their functions would be

an identification of those field posts which, even if they are currently filled by other categories of staff, are indeed at the professional level. The Administration is of the view that rather than aligning the entitlements of Field Service officers with those of other categories of staff, it should be the alignment of the level of posts encumbered by Field Service officers with those of other categories of staff, including those in the Professional category. This means that if a staff member performs professional-level functions in a post to which he or she has been selected on the basis of his or her qualifications and experience, the staff member should be recruited at or converted to the Professional level. Similarly, Field Service officers who are performing professional-level duties in the field missions, often at supervisory or middle-management level, should be converted to the Professional category. The Office of Human Resources Management and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations will review these issues, taking into account existing policies for the promotion of non-Professional staff and the appointment of former non-Professional staff to the Professional level.

23. With regard to the effects of abolishing specific Field Service posts and their replacement with either Professional or General Service posts and harmonizing the criteria and procedures for the recruitment, placement and promotion of Field Service staff with those applicable to the Professional and General Service categories (see A/57/78, para. 60), it should be noted that qualified staff at the FS-6 and FS-7 levels may be considered for internal vacancies where no qualified internal Professional candidates are available (see ST/AI/360/Rev.1 and Corr.1, para. 12). Furthermore, they are considered as eligible internal candidates for externally circulated posts at the P-3 and P-4 levels that were created in response to the report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations.

24. As regards the recommendation on the procedures and criteria for the recruitment and promotion of Field Service officers, again, the Personnel Management and Support Service has taken the initial steps towards the establishment of a placement and promotion system for all staff serving in the field. Given that the organizational policy in this regard is about to change in the context of the human resources management reform, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations is working closely with the Office of Human Resources Management to ensure that, while maintaining the flexibility required by the Department to expediently assign staff, its field policies and procedures are compatible with the policies and procedures applicable to the General Service or Professional staff at Headquarters.

(c) Specific efforts should be undertaken to improve the gender balance and geographic representation within the Field Service, especially in the highest grades of the category.

The measures set out in (a), (b) and (c) above should be taken immediately by the Secretariat, notwithstanding the results of the reviews suggested in recommendations 1 to 4.

25. Given the historical background of the recruitment of Field Service officers (see, e.g., A/57/78, paras. 1, 12 and 15; the original restriction was "physically fit single men between the ages 22 and 30 with necessary technical background and preferably military experience"), and taking into account the recruitment freeze in effect for the category since 1993, the data on the gender balance of current Field Service officers is hardly surprising. While posts in the field missions are not subject to geographical distribution, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations is committed, operational requirements permitting, to improving geographical distribution and gender balance among the field staff.

Recommendation 6: In consultation with the Field Administration and Logistics Division, the Field Service Staff Union and the Office of Human Resources Management, and after reviewing practices of other United Nations organizations, the Secretary-General should propose a number of measures to alleviate the strain of field service life on individual staff members and their families. Such measures could include the appointment of qualified counsellors in all peace operations.

26. The Administration fully agrees with the expansion of the use and application of staff counsellors in field missions, as also agreed at the twenty-fifth session of the Staff-Management Coordination Committee. However, there are other policies and practices the Organization should put in place in order to create working conditions that offer greater stability and are more family friendly, such as

improved spouse employment opportunities, child and elder care initiatives, counsellors for drug and alcohol abuse, ombudsmen, legal aid and improved rest and recuperation schemes. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations will, in consultation with the Office of Human Resources Management and its other partners, look into these issues with a view to improving the quality of living and working conditions of field staff.

Recommendation 7: In order to implement recommendations 1 to 6, the Secretary-General should devote adequate resources (2 Professionals on a full-time basis for 18 months in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations) to the reform of the Field Service.

27. While there is agreement in principle with this recommendation, it is noteworthy to mention that in a way the entire Personnel Management and Support Service is dedicated to the work on reform. As seen in the present report and as reported earlier, the task of reforming the Field Service category is connected to all the other activities of the Service, such as developing mission modules and templates, creating generic job profiles, conducting a skills inventory and assessing training needs, developing and implementing training programmes and revising the conditions of service of field staff. It is therefore difficult to allocate two Professionals to work in isolation on the reform only. Clearly, at the later stage when the review of the profiles of field staff is conducted and, in particular, when the report to the General Assembly is to be prepared, staff members would need to be assigned to draft a comprehensive proposal on this matter.